

May 5, 2022

Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority Board of Directors
County Government Center
70 West Hedding Street
San Jose, CA 95110

Re: Agenda Item 7, Contract Package 2 Tunnel and Trackwork

Dear Chair Jones and Santa Clara Valley Transportation Agency Board of Directors,

SPUR is a long-time supporter of BART Phase II. It is a critical project to the region and SPUR is invested in its success. At the same time, we are concerned about the impacts of the project's design on ease and safety of passenger access; passenger experience; integration with and ability to maximize transit-oriented development, and operational efficiency, particularly for the downtown San Jose station and Diridon station.

To be clear, SPUR is not motivated by a preference for a particular tunneling methodology, be it double bore or single bore. Rather, our goals are to maximize the project's success and see that it is delivered cost effectively. We wish to ensure that this project provides the most benefit to riders and to residents of the city, county and region.

We are collaborating with VTA, SJDOT, and BART to explore ideas to improve the current single-bore project. We appreciate the leadership of Mayor Liccardo to bring stakeholders together and thoughtful and collaborative work among all parties to improve the design of the project.

We further applaud the direction outlined by Chair Jones, Mayor Liccardo and Director Peralez today. Though we fully appreciate the laser focus that is required to deliver a project BART Phase II, particularly in California, we also recognize the common challenges that most megaprojects face, including the tendency to pursue certain decisions - even when new information, circumstances or challenges emerge. The direction today focuses on overcoming this challenge and makes it possible to develop new ideas and alternatives that can lead to a project with greater public benefit.

- 1. We encourage the VTA Board to approve stage 1 of the CP2 contract.** In addition, we strongly support the direction of Mayor Liccardo, Chair Jones and Director Peralez to bring a revised funding plan and a cost management strategy before the Board at the earliest opportunity. The sooner that these plans can be brought forward, the sooner that VTA, BART and the region can put their collective strength behind funding this critical project.
- 2. We encourage the Board to direct staff and the contractor team to develop design refinements as part of the CP2 (tunneling and trackwork) and the future CP4 (stations) contract.**

We request that the alternatives described above be brought back to both BART and VTA for a vote to select preferred designs for tunneling and stations to advance.

We recommend including the following design refinements in stage 1 of the CP2 contract and the future CP4 contract:

- A second entrance at Diridon station with a direct connection to the train platforms in order to improve access, circulation and safety.
- Entrances/exits on both sides of Santa Clara Street for both downtown and Diridon stations.
- A direct, easy connection between BART and other modes that will be co-located at Diridon station.
- An alternative to the currently proposed secondary downtown station entrance to improve safety and customer experience.
- Improved boarding efficiency and circulation of passengers on the platform at the downtown station.
- An alternative that combines a single-bore tunnel with cut-and-cover stations. (See #3).
- Improved integration of the Diridon headhouse with transit-oriented development, including at least one proposal for a headhouse that has well-defined edges to integrate with buildings.
- An alternative that allows for more transit-oriented development on surrounding parcels.

It is possible that some of these design refinements could add to the project's price. However, these are not luxuries—they are essential to the project. Without them, it will not be possible to achieve the fundamental goals of this project: getting people onto the BART train, supporting Santa Clara County's growth, and creating a great public place. This project will shape San Jose, Santa Clara and the region for a century.

3. The design refinements should handle the issues of tunnels and stations individually. There are two distinct construction decisions that are consequential to this project and they are driven by two distinct issues.

- a. The first is the decision to use a single-bore tunnel instead of a double-bore tunnel. This is intended to avoid conflicts with underground utilities because it is deeper than a double-bore tunnel, allowing it to go underneath utilities.
- b. The second is the decision to locate stations and passenger circulation inside the circular tunnel shaft, instead of using cut-and-cover construction to build the stations closer to the surface. The decision to avoid cut-and-cover stations was driven largely by downtown businesses who were concerned about temporary surface construction and disruption required for cut-and-cover stations for a portion of Santa Clara Street, given past experiences of construction-related disruption.

A single bore tunnel does not require stations to be located inside of the circular tunnel shaft.

A “hybrid” project with a single bore tunnel and cut-and-cover stations is currently under construction in Toronto, offering a pathway to reduce utility interference with improved passenger experience. We respectfully request that this idea be explored as part of stage 1 of the CP 2 contract. This approach merits further business mitigation efforts, including business interruption funds. Ideally, this hybrid concept would also be included in the independent analysis prior to stage 2 of the CP2 contract.

4. Independent Analysis

We strongly support the proposal for an independent analysis for the cost, timeline, assumed constraints, risks and passenger experience of double - and single - bore project alternatives. This is an important step to take in parallel with efforts to improve the current project. The prior study was conducted in 2017, had a limited scope, and is now somewhat out of date. For instance, the 2017 study did not include a consideration of passenger experience, and the project design has advanced significantly in intervening years. New operating, safety, and passenger experience challenges have become apparent only in recent months. The financial outlooks of VTA and BART have worsened in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Further, we strongly recommend that the independent analysis be jointly managed by VTA, BART and /or the City of San Jose. Given the broader scope of the analysis, we encourage that the analysis be completed by independent individuals and firms with expertise in station design and development, urban design, passenger experience, transit operations, real estate economics, construction management, and underground construction methods. As above, this should happen concurrently with stage 1 of CP2, so that decisions can be incorporated into stage 1 of CP2 and future contracts.

In conclusion, BART Phase II is a complex but critical project and SPUR is invested in its success. We hope to continue support the project partners in working to achieve lasting benefits for San Jose and the region while being mindful of near-term hurdles and opportunities ahead.

Sincerely,

Laura Tolhoff

Laura Tolhoff
Transportation Policy Director